

Smoky Mountain Reflections

Reformation #2

Five hundred years: a lot can happen in five hundred years. It has been over five hundred years since Martin Luther posted his famous 95 theses. What has any of that history got to do with anything we are doing in East Tennessee? Well, our daily walk through God's word and our practice of faith, are directly affected by this historic reality. All of what we believe, teach, and confess from scripture is neatly wrapped for us in Luther's small catechism, a short 35-page work that summarizes the basics of the Christian faith. Many other questions were further clarified for us in the Book of Concord which contains the small catechism, along with 9 other works, and was published in 1580. So God's truth is clarified for us in these works and guides how we apply it today.

Past generations have warned against the distraction of anniversaries causing people to lose focus on what is important. I remember being in middle school when our nation celebrated its Bicentennial, and it seemed that was all anyone ever talked about and it probably led to some important things being overlooked. I do not think we have a distraction to worry about but we need to be concerned about how this can and will affect our ability to share the Gospel. When people hear about Martin Luther, as worldwide coverage of the 500th anniversary makes news, your non-Lutheran neighbor might, for the first time, make a connection between the German Martin Luther and the American Martin Luther King Jr. Or they might say "Aren't you Lutheran?" "What do Lutherans believe?" You have just had a soft ball tossed in your direction, so how do you respond?

Here are a few quick ways to answer those and other questions about your faith.

- We believe the 66 books that make up the old and new testament to be the inspired word of God
- All that we know believe and teach about God comes from those 66 books.
- We believe in the 10 commandments, (know them in case people ask - Ex. 20 & Deut. 5)
- We believe in the 3 historic creeds, (know them, for people may ask) Apostles, Nicene, Athanasian
- We believe in and use the Lord's Prayer (be ready to share it)
- We believe that God connects us to Himself in the waters of Holy Baptism
- We believe that the forgiveness Jesus bled and died for is delivered by His means
- We believe that Christ gives us forgiveness in the Lord Supper

(These last three will cause much conversation, so if you bring them up, be ready to explain them)

Now since the world has only about 80 million Lutherans and we are part of a small minority, less than 3.5 million people are in what is called the "International Lutheran Council" (ILC), it is helpful to know what sets us apart from other Lutherans. That would be how we apply the Bible and the confessions. How that plays out in ILC congregations is that only men are ordained to be pastors and we are uniformly pro-life. However, with the larger "Lutheran World Federation" (LWF), which has some 72 million members, pushing in recent years for gay rights, many of the Lutherans in the global south are shifting to or have already shifted to the ILC. So while there is a global shift going on we are still part of a very small minority.

Historically speaking the church is used to being part of a persecuted minority, Seth, Noah, Abraham, the prophets, the exiled remnant, the early church, and martyred Christians for the past 2000 years know the same persecution that Able suffered at the hands of Cane. But we trust in God and press on.

In Christ Pastor Portier